

## The Honorable John D. Dingell's remarks at the Center for American Progress SCHIP Event

Statement of Congressman John D. Dingell, Chairman  
Committee on Energy and Commerce

Remarks as Prepared for  
THE HONORABLE JOHN D. DINGELL  
Center for American Progress SCHIP Event  
March 29, 2007

Thank you, Senator Daschle, for your kind words and for the leadership and expertise you bring to this discussion.

I also want to thank John Podesta and his team at the Center for America Progress for inviting me here and providing a forum for us to consider how we can best build upon the success of the State Children's Health Insurance Program.

I'd also like to recognize my friend and colleague, Senator Smith, who, unfortunately, couldn't be here this morning. Senator Smith's commitment to this issue runs deep and I'm proud to work with him in protecting the health of our children.

As Senator Daschle mentioned, this year marks the 10th anniversary of SCHIP's creation. Over the last decade SCHIP has proven to be a highly effective and essential program. And, in the months ahead, we will begin the important work of reauthorizing it.

As we turn our attention to this process, today provides a useful opportunity for us to take stock of what's working and to share our thoughts on how we can best arrive at a future in which all our children have access to the care and treatment they need and deserve.

This conversation is an urgent one. Because, if this morning is like any other morning in America, right now a company is laying off a worker it can't afford to cover. Right now a pregnant woman is forgoing prenatal care because of its high cost. And right now a sick child is not being treated because a trip to the doctor is too expensive.

It is nothing short of a disgrace that -- in the wealthiest country in the world -- nearly nine million children are without health coverage. Most of these kids are in families with working parents who have jobs that do not provide insurance. And too many of these families cannot afford to buy coverage on their own.

The staggering number of uninsured kids is especially frustrating in light of the fact that they are so inexpensive to cover. It costs less than \$3.50 a day -- less than the cost of a Starbucks Frappuccino -- to provide a child with health insurance. For the cost of just one MRI machine, more than 1,500 children could be covered for a full year.

We can and must do more to provide our children with the care they need. That's one of the reasons that, two weeks ago,

I joined with Senator Clinton in introducing legislation that will provide all children with access to quality, affordable healthcare coverage. This bill, called the Children's Health First Act, would provide states with the incentives and resources needed to expand existing coverage programs for children. And it provides new incentives to expand and protect employer-sponsored coverage.

I'm excited to tell you about three specific components of this legislation:

First, in an effort to ensure that every child has an affordable health care option, the bill would allow states to offer coverage to children in families with incomes up to \$70,000 per year. In addition, higher income families and businesses could purchase coverage through the program.

Second, the bill provides strong incentives to reach the six million children who -- though eligible for coverage -- are currently not enrolled. Parents could sign their children up for this affordable coverage in schools and hospitals. And families would be able to enroll their children in insurance for a full year.

Third, it would shore up the SCHIP program to ensure that states have adequate resources to meet our children's growing health care needs.

I believe SCHIP is one of the best ideas to have come out of Congress in all my years on Capitol Hill. SCHIP has given millions of children access to affordable healthcare coverage. Not only has this program made a difference. It has made history. And its original enactment is a testament to what Congress can accomplish when we are willing to put partisanship aside and put our children first.

I've been in Congress for more than half a century -- long enough to have learned that good ideas, good works, and, most importantly, good results don't come out of thin air. They come from collaborative thinking. They come from a deep commitment to improving the lives of others. And they come from a willingness to seek common ground and achieve reasonable compromise.

As many of you may know, expanding access to healthcare is something I'm passionate about and deeply committed to accomplishing. I remember when President Truman issued the first call for a national health care plan. And I remember when, in 1942, my father tried to answer this call by introducing the National Health Insurance Act in the House of Representatives.

Each year that I've been in Congress, I have introduced a bill that would provide universal access to coverage. Some see this as an act of profound stubbornness. Some see this as an act of great optimism. But, to me, it is simply the right thing to do.

This impulse to do the right thing -- this responsibility to do the right thing -- is what inspired the Children's Health First Act and SCHIP. And it's what has brought us together today to discuss how we can best protect and expand this critical program.

Although our healthcare system is one of the best in the world, unfortunately, not everyone has access to it. This has triggered what many believe to be a serious healthcare crisis. But the good news is that we've been through this before. It took years of discussion and negotiation -- and, of course, compromise -- before President Johnson signed the Medicare and Medicaid programs into law in 1965. Though their enactment seemed impossible at times, these programs have proved to be the most successful government programs in history. And SCHIP has strengthened and extended this success by helping states provide health coverage to uninsured low-income children who aren't eligible for coverage under Medicaid or Medicaid.

While we must never surrender in our fight for universal healthcare coverage, we need immediate solutions to address rising healthcare costs. I believe the first step should be covering all children. That's why I stand behind the Children's Health First Act. And it's why I support passing a comprehensive SCHIP reauthorization bill.

As we all know, the current budget situation is a difficult one. And differences may arise over the extent to which we can afford to expand SCHIP. But there is broad agreement that Congress and the White House must enact legislation to cover more children this year through the SCHIP program. And I believe we can't afford not to make insuring our children a top priority. When we do, I am certain we will be able to find the necessary funding. And I want you to know that I -- along with many others -- am fully committed to accomplishing this.

I want to thank you all for being involved in today's discussion. I look forward to getting started.

-30-

Prepared by the Committee on Energy and Commerce  
2125 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, DC 20515